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Testimony of Cynthia Dugan, Sexual Assault Victim Advocate

Rape Crisis Center of Milford

In Support of the provision in **H.B. No. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET**

FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025 to enhance funding for victim service

providers

February 22, 2023

Senator Osteen, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Cynthia Dugan. I am a victim advocate at the Rape Crisis Center of Milford. Our center is one of nine center providing services to victims of sexual assault and their family. The communities we service include Ansonia, Derby, Milford, Orange, Seymour, Shelton, and West Haven.

The Rape Crisis Center of Milford offers a 24/7 Confidential crisis hotline, short-term counseling for victims of sexual assault and their families, accompaniment, support and advocacy at hospitals for the collection of evidence, police departments should they decide to report this crime, and support at court proceedings including meetings with prosecutors in preparation for trial. Although we work very closely with our hospital, police, and court personnel, we will continue to provide counseling and support services beyond the criminal process.

Our center was established in 1974. Since that time we have continued to expand our community education program which provides personal safety education for Pre K-6 grade students, safety and violence prevention education for middle and high school students that includes healthy relationships, dating violence, cyber bullying, consent, and presentations on sexting. Our community educators and equipped to provide these programs to all students in our service areas. Additionally our college victim advocates provide similar services to college students at the University of New Haven. Staff members also provide specialized police training for area police departments.

I have been a victim advocate for this center for over 26 years. I do recognize and respect the difficult decisions this committee is charged with regarding our state budget. However, I once again find myself asking for your support on this bill. This funding provision is a direct result of the loss of Victim of Crimes Act (VOCA) funds that support our work providing these comprehensive, trauma-informed services **free of cost to all the victims we serve.**

Testimony of Cynthia Dugan, Sexual Assault Victim Advocate
Rape Crisis Center of Milford

VOCA funds, which are generated from federal criminal fines and fees, are at an all-time low due to fines being redirected to the General Treasury under the previous administration. While the current administration signed the "VOCA Fix" bill in 2021 to correct this issue, VOCA funds continue to lag and are not expected to reach previous funding amounts.

We thank Governor Lamont for his proposal to include a \$12.175 million allocation to the Judicial Branch to supplement the lack of federal VOCA funds in Connecticut. These funds ensure victims have access to critical support, counseling, advocacy, and help to navigate the complex criminal justice system. Without this funding our center would not be able to continue to provide these unique and vital services to our clients.

Over the last 48 years our center has helped countless victims navigate this difficult process from disclosure to disposition and beyond with the goal being emotional and physical recovery in order to take back control of their lives. We continue to build relationships from many disciplines in our community as the victims we serve continues to grow.

I urge you to support the Governor's proposed use of the funds to ensure that the loss of VOCA funds does not affect the services we have worked so hard to provide and build upon. Sexual assault survivors will not be able to receive the services we provide anywhere else. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you through this testimony.

Sincerely,
Cynthia Dugan
Counselor/Advocate
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